

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

ACTION

SECRET/EYES ONLY

February 16, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR:

MR. KISSINGER

FROM:

JOHN D. NEGROPONTE

SUBJECT:

Ambassador Porter Recommends that After Peking Visit We Consider Suspending Paris Talks Unless DRV Permits Access to our POW's By Neutral Body and Agrees to Exchange of Sick and Wounded

NSS/NSC, State
Dept. reviews
completed

MORI/CDF C05081427
pgs 2-5 match the target

Background

Ambassador Porter has sent you a message recommending that after the Peking visit you consider sending a private message to the North Vietnamese to the effect that unless they permit access to prisoners by a neutral body and agree to an exchange of sick and wounded prisoners we will suspend the Paris Talks until further notice (Tab B). 25X1

Ambassador Porter notes that he has already dealt with Xuan Thuy's statement that access cannot be granted to our POW's in Vietnam because it might trigger a U.S. commando raid. In a recent plenary session Porter pointed out that it would be a simple matter to bring the prisoners to a neutral medical body in Hanoi for inspection without revealing the locations of detention camps.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Porter's Proposal

Advantages:

1. This course of action might actually have an impact on the DRV's approach to the handling of our POW's, if indeed they are sensitive about the prospect of losing the Paris Plenary forum.
2. The GVN would welcome this step as an indication of firmness in our position, particularly in the aftermath of all the fuss about "flexibility".

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3. We would in effect be temporarily closing down a forum which is widely considered to be sterile. It is also a forum which many judge as offering a better propaganda platform to the DRV than to the allied side.

4. It would demonstrate in yet another concrete way that we really care about our men held captive in North Vietnam.

Disadvantages:

1. The suspension suggested might not have the desired effect of gaining access to our POW's and the exchange of sick and wounded.

2. This course might generate unnecessary criticism from those who would prefer to blame us rather than the DRV for lack of progress in Paris.

3. We would disrupt a channel which has been useful in minor ways (e.g. exchanging messages about POW packages, orchestrating our public stance with our private initiatives, and maintaining the talks as a symbol of our willingness to negotiate seriously with the other side whenever it is prepared to do so).

4. As a general proposition, we would simply be making more of a fuss about the Paris Talks than most people probably think it is worth.

Our Views

We think Ambassador Porter's recommendation has some merit and, of course, is very much in keeping with his innovative style.

The key judgment would seem to boil down to weighing the advantage of showing our real concern for our POW's versus the disadvantage of the adverse publicity we might get for in effect taking the initiative in suspending the talks.

We believe this is really a toss-up judgment which only you and the President can decide. We have, however, prepared a draft reply to Porter on the assumption that you will decide against the proposal, pointing out that this is an idea that we may wish to hold in reserve but we do not wish to rock the Paris boat quite so much at this time.

Recommendation:

That you approve the message to Porter at Tab A.

SECRET/EYES ONLY

SECRET/EYES ONLY FOR AMBASSADOR PORTER

25X1

FROM HENRY A. KISSINGER

REFERENCE YOUR 570

1. Many thanks for your message under reference. We think your idea has merit although the President may wish to hold it in reserve for a little while.
2. In any event we will keep your suggestion very much in mind, and, of course, consult with you beforehand should we decide to go through with it.
3. Your kind wishes for the forthcoming trip are most appreciated here.

Warm regards,

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TO THE WHITE HOUSE

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FM AMBASSADOR PORTER 570

TO THE WHITE HOUSE EYES ONLY FOR DR. HENRY KISSINGER.

1. YOU ARE AWARE THAT NVN/VC REMAIN DISTURBED BY PROSPECT OF PEKING TALKS. THEIR ACQUIESCENCE IN RUSSIAN/FRENCH CP EXCLUSION OF MAOIST FACTIONS FROM VERSAILLES CONFERENCE WILL NOT GO UNNOTICED IN PEKING.

2. I RECOMMEND THAT AFTER PEKING VISIT YOU CONSIDER SENDING PRIVATE MESSAGE TO NORTH VIETNAMESE THAT UNLESS THEY PERMIT ACCESS TO PRISONERS BY NEUTRAL BODY AND EXCHANGE OF SICK AND WOUNDED WE WILL SUSPEND NOT TERMINATED TALKS UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. I HAVE ALREADY DEALT WITH THUY'S STATEMENT THAT ACCESS CANNOT BE GRANTED BECAUSE IT MIGHT TRIGGER U.S. COMMANDO RAID. IT WOULD BE SIMPLE MATTER TO BRING PRISONERS TO NEUTRAL MEDICAL BODY IN HANOI FOR INSPECTION WITHOUT REVEALING LOCATIONS OF DETENTION CAMPS. OR NVN COULD HAVE CLOSEUPS TAKEN OF PRISONERS PERIODICALLY FOR SENDING TO THEIR FAMILIES.

3. IN SUSPENDING TALKS HERE ON THIS ISSUE IT WOULD NOT BE NECESSARY TO MAKE MENTION OF PRIVATE MESSAGE THOUGH FACT OF IT HAVING BEEN SENT MIGHT BE USEFUL TO US LATER.

4. WARM REGARDS AND BEST WISHES FOR SUCCESS OF PRESIDENT'S TRIP TO PEKING.

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